

## Hellmut O Pappe(unpublished) Sismondi, Constant and Tocqueville

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SISMONDI, CONSTANT AND TOCQUEVILLE

**HELLMUT O. PAPPE**

Edited by Richard Whatmore, University of Sussex

Editors introduction

Hellmut Pappé died in 1998. Since the publication of *Sismondi's Weggenossen* (Geneva, 1956), he had been planning a new biography of Sismondi intended both to replace J. R. Salis's *Sismondi, 1775-1842: la vie et l'oeuvre d'un cosmopolite philosophe* (1932) and to give a fuller view of Sismondi's influence, particularly over significant luminaries of nineteenth century European thought. Although Hellmut Pappé continued working until his death, his published work in this field was limited to a number of articles on Sismondi and editions of such works as the 'Statistique du Département du Léman'. Among the papers he left to the University of Sussex, however, were transcriptions of Sismondi's mother and sister's diaries, three chapters of the biography describing Sismondi's life up to 1800, and some miscellaneous papers, destined for the second volume of the biography, describing Sismondi's relationships with his contemporaries. The paper published here comes from the latter collection and appears to have been one of the last papers that Hellmut Pappé completed. For reasons of brevity, the version of the paper published here omits the final section of the manuscript version, dealing with Sismondi's view of North America, in addition to several of the more extensive notes. The paper underlines Pappé's concern to restore Sismondi to the first rank of European political economists and historians.

**I**

Charles Dunoyer failed to mention Sismondi in his authoritative essay on the origin of industrialisation. It was Benjamin Constant whom he credited with having been the first writer who pointed out the veritable nature of modern society and politics. He said of Constant's book *On the spirit of conquest* of 1813:

...it was the first time that one clearly pinpointed the difference between the ancients and the moderns. It was the first time that anyone suggested to the modern peoples that they were aiming their activity at the target of industrial production (rather than military conquest). This observation which today would appear trivial, was then extremely novel and, I believe, I remember it coming as a revelation. (Dunoyer 1827, p. 371)

Dunoyer's view has been widely taken up in more recent English publications after interest in the 'two concepts of liberty' had been aroused by Isaiah Berlin's inaugural lecture in 1958 (Siedentop 1979; Hayward 1991).

Constant, however, never claimed originality for his contributions to the literature on the two concepts of liberty. Apart from a reference to Condorcet, he consistently conceded priority to Sismondi who, he said, had developed the thesis more thoroughly: 'I quote with pleasure this work (Sismondi's *History of the Italian Republics*) produced by a noble character and distinguished author'. In his famous speech of February 1819 'On the liberty of the ancients compared with that of the moderns', Constant called for a combination of both concepts of liberty, invoking once more the ascendance of Sismondi, 'the celebrated author of the *History of the Italian Republics in the Middle Ages*' (Constant 1957, p. 1011; 1980, p. 514).

Actually, Constant had long been familiar with Sismondi's analysis of liberty. In 1801, he had read in manuscript Sismondi's *Inquiries concerning the constitutions of free countries*, one of three works which proved to be most important in the development of his own political thought (the two other works were William Godwin's *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* of 1793, which Constant translated into French, and Madame de Staël's *Des circonstances actuelles*, which he had partly co-authored). There had been a history of intimate friendship between Sismondi's family and Constant's Genevan cousins. When Sismondi returned to Geneva from his Italian exile and joined Madame de Staël's circle at Coppet in 1800, a close relationship soon sprang up between him and Madame de Staël's then lover. They read to each other and discussed their work in progress.

Constant divided his time between Coppet and Paris where he was Genevan representative at the Tribunal, the advisory council under the ruling Consulate. He offered to take Sismondi's manuscript to Paris with a view to having it published. He submitted it to the *Classe des sciences morales et politiques* of the *Institut National des Sciences et Arts* (later the *Institut de France*), asking for an official appraisal of Sismondi's text, obviously in the hope that, by this means, a publisher might be found despite the forbidding vicissitudes of the times. The assessment requested by Constant proved to be outside the competence of the *Institut*, but the members who had read the manuscript were greatly impressed by the book. The secretary of the *Classe*, Jean-François Champagne (1751-1819), the translator of Aristotle's *Politics* and Grotius's *Mare liberum*, as well as John Selden's *Mare clausum*, wrote to the 'citoyen Simonde de Genève' that his important and beautiful work 'would no doubt find its publisher. He complimented the author on 'this distinguished work of erudition combined with wisdom' (Sismondi 1965, pp. 16-7). The *Inquiries*, like the other early works of Sismondi, contained the germ of his thoughts on social science, including political economy and history, on which he was to elaborate in his mature productions. The social reforms suggested in the *New Principles*, as well as the distinction between the two concepts of liberty come, in fact, from his early writings.

The subject matter of the *Inquiries* was, in Sismondi's words, the history of liberty itself, its origin in Geneva, its progress, its transformations under different local and temporal conditions, its decay at the end of the Roman Republic, and its renaissance following the invasions by the barbarian peoples of northern Europe. Sismondi differentiated in the *Inquiries* between democratic liberty, signifying participation in government, and civil liberty, corresponding to negative individual liberty from interference, both these forms of liberty being held in balance by political liberty, i.e. the rule of law. Sismondi was indebted in this respect to Machiavelli and his disciples no less than to his more immediate precursors such as Montesquieu, Hume, Ferguson and Delolme. Like Montesquieu, Sismondi understood the function of liberty as consisting both in the preservation of the law as well as in the protection of the individual against the intrusion of authority. As for Hume,

the history of liberty was, for Sismondi, equivalent to the history of civilisation and the rise of the middle classes. Ferguson's memorable formulation of the two concepts of liberty is worth quoting:

To the ancient Greek, or the Roman, the individual was nothing, and the public everything.

To the modern, in too many nations of Europe, the individual is everything, and the public nothing. The state is merely a combination of departments, in which consideration, wealth, eminence or power are offered as the reward of service (Ferguson, 1966, p. 56).

If Ferguson gave prominence to the detrimental aspects of modern or negative liberty, Delolme deprecated ancient liberty, i.e. the participation of individuals in government, by insisting that it did not confer liberty on citizens but symbolized the prerogative of colonisers, being at best merely a means to establish liberty. Among other immediate forerunners of Sismondi, his teacher Pierre Prévost represented the philosophy of the Scottish School at the *Académie*, the university of Geneva. He was a close friend of Dugald Stewart, and the translator of Stewart, Adam Smith and Hugh Blair. He held that the ancient Greeks confused what they called liberties with the privileges which distinguished them from the barbarians: the right to speak in the assembly and to vote, even to keep slaves, and other elitist prerogatives. Prévost, probably following Delolme, took issue with Rousseau for committing the same mistake in holding that the British were free only at the rare times of elections when they were permitted to vote (Prévost 1783).

Prior to Sismondi, there were a number of thinkers in various European countries who had called attention to the rise of civil and commercial society, that is, to historical change, both as regards the structure of society and its civilisation. Hume and Adam Smith had pointed out the positive aspects of the revolution gradually being brought about by commerce and manufactures which resulted in the introduction of order and good government and, with these, the liberty and security of individuals. But it was left to Sismondi to spell out these insights in greater detail in the light of the invention and introduction of machinery in the following decades. The new technology altered and revolutionised the whole of industrial and agricultural production and led to drastic shifts in the

distribution of population, industrial relations, and world trade. Not only was Sismondi thus able to go into greater detail: he was the first among economists to make explicit the fact that there was a dark side to technological improvement with its vastly increased production. He did so by analysing commercial crises as being caused by overproduction and the ensuing unemployment which, in turn, gave rise to under-consumption. He was the first to perceive the sum total of the problems engendered by the new industrialism rather than emphasizing merely its merits or its flaws respectively. And he was the first to give convincing economic reasons for the participation of all citizens, not only in government and security of individual life and property, but also in the enjoyment of the boons of civilisation such as health, leisure and education, in short, in what Berlin has called 'the conditions of liberty', and Rawls 'the worth of liberty'. He adapted the political and social insights of the Florentine Renaissance, of the neo-Harringtonians and the Scots of the eighteenth century, so as to fit a state and a society whose structure was undergoing radical change.

## II

Benjamin Constant, from his reading and continual exchange of ideas with the author, had an intimate knowledge of Sismondi's socio-political thought. In the context of the concept of the two liberties, as mentioned, he quoted in particular the *History of the Italian Republics* which indeed contains some of Sismondi's foremost contributions to his social theory and his seminal interpretation of the Renaissance. The narrative part of the work is interlaced with summary chapters which, in brilliant sociological displays, analyse the main achievements and trends of an epoch or, in other words, the distinctive spirit of each of the centuries treated in the text (Sismondi's models in this procedure were the histories of Hume, Robertson, Gibbon and Cousin Despréaux who, in one form or other, had applied this approach in their 'philosophical histories'). As regards the Renaissance, Sismondi was the first modern writer to take up and re-introduce the contemporary theory that places the true achievements of the Renaissance in the time from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> century. In contrast to Voltaire and his followers, Sismondi regarded the high Renaissance of the sixteenth century as the ultimate phase heralding decay due to the loss of liberty. The gaining and

the loss of liberty were indeed the guiding theme of the *History of the Italian Republics*. As regards the two concepts of liberty, Sismondi's (and following him, Constant's) aim was to combine both political and private liberty in the participation and consensus of all citizens, in the exercise of government no less than in the social and spiritual blessings of civilisation. The specific virtues of both the martial and commercial civilisations were needed for a viable and lasting society:

In the conflicts of the citizens, first with the nobles, and later with the lower-class, civil liberty was certainly often violated... all the same, in midst of these disorders, while civil liberty succumbed, democratic liberty survived. The latter consists, not in guarantees, but in powers; it does not secure to the people either peace, order, prosperity or fairness, but it carries with it its own reward. For the citizen, once he has experienced it, it is the sweetest of gratifications, namely, to exert influence upon the fate of the country, to take part in its sovereignty, in particular, to find his own place immediately under the law, and to acknowledge no authorities unless he [or his peers] had a hand in creating them. This way of transcending one's own private self in order to live in common, to feel in common, to form part of a great entity, elevates man and makes him capable of achieving great things (Sismondi 1966, p. 364).

Sismondi's gut feeling, like Ferguson's, was in favour of ancient liberty because it presented the individual with the rights as well as the responsibility of a free citizen with a voice, real or imagined, in the public realm. At the same time, Sismondi was aware of the inherent danger in such a condition: patriotism was liable to open the door to despotism in the name of public duty. It needed to be balanced by the rights of the individual, the right to be protected from arbitrary invasions of his private domain, which alone provided him with the opportunity to develop his talents, to be secure in life and property, with impartial courts upholding the rule of law. The right to take part in the power of the state was in of being complemented by protection from the state. In the same way, the modern liberty of the individual was doomed to end up in narrow egoism. In his 'Considerations regarding the character of the fourteenth century', Sismondi expressed his anxiety

concerning the dangers of an unbridled individualism, a development which Jacob Burckhardt was later to celebrate as an achievement of the Renaissance:

In the fourteenth century, the individuals stand out farther from the crowd; they draw attention to themselves; they do so by their achievements, their talents or their crimes: but the nation to which they belong does not advance; while the individuals, like a will-o'-the-wisp, shine and blaze in every sense, the various peoples to whom they should have given guidance, lose themselves in the tortuous shifts of politics; they advance and fall back in turn: some march towards liberty, others towards despotism (Sismondi 1966, p. 195).

Sismondi's pervasive theme, from the *Researches* of 1798 onward, was an inquiry into the original and unfolding human liberty, from the inchoate intrepidity of the savage invaders of Italy to the social force which emerged on the creation and culmination of civilisation, and to its eventual decline. He thus delineated a taxonomy of liberty, characterising free government as exhibiting both positive and negative liberties, in particular, the participation of citizens in government and well-being, the rule of law, publicity of administration and jurisdiction, freedom of thought and press, and freedom of education and religion. The common denominator for these conditions, in Sismondi's view:

inhered in the development of the individual, his desire and ability towards self-perfection, with free and animated communion with his fellow man that warms the soul and diffuses noble sentiments even among classes unenlightened by the knowledge of the past or by the experience of foreign nations (Sismondi 1966, pp. 255-6).

Constant accepted Sismondi's ideas and formulations concerning the nature and rise of liberty; like Sismondi, he rejected the fallacy inherent in identifying national independence with the liberty of the individual, nor, like Sismondi, would he admit the right of the state or others to protect the individual from his own actions. But he differed from Sismondi in his emphasis on negative liberty being 'true liberty' and 'the single and human association', thus leaving the door open to the



excessive individualism of radical liberalism (Constant 1980; 1822, p. 1). Accordingly, he did not follow Sismondi on the question of state intervention: for Sismondi, it was a matter of pragmatic judgement or piecemeal engineering; for Constant, it was an inviolable part of doctrine (Constant 1824, p. 301).

It would be mistaken to regard Constant as in any way a mere disciple either of Madame de Staël or Sismondi. He was a great artist and a man of letters in his own right. Moreover, he shared the knowledge of French, Scots, English, German and Italian precursors with Sismondi. He was, however, indebted to Sismondi's histories of Italy and France for a deeper understanding of the concept of the Spirit of the Age, the quintessence of the Ideal Type of an epoch or a group as exemplified by the concept of the two liberties. Sismondi's vista of England's history, its present state, and its prospect for the future, as perceived and taken up by Constant, may illustrate this point. The *Commentary on the Work of Filangieri* was Constant's most comprehensive published work in the field of social science. Filangieri expected England (=Britain) to be condemned to decline and fall because of the absurdity and cruelty of its commercial laws and the inequalities within the country and in its relations with its colonies. Constant admitted that such institutions had caused the decay of Spain. But the British case, he held, was different; Britain, as Sismondi had expressed it, had retained its greatness, not because of, but despite of its constitution. Parliamentary debates, participation in local government, and the freedom of the press, counterbalanced the flaws of legislation and administration, even if such liberties were often only imaginary. What really threatened Britain was the structural change from feudalism to industrialism and the ensuing creation of an enormously large class of proletarians. These represented a threat to the country's survival, a threat, however, which could be averted by government intervention with a view to diminishing the rights of the masters and creating, and adding to, the rights of the labouring classes. Such speculations concerning future tendencies, arising from an interpretation of present transmutations, were an outstanding feature of Sismondi's tableau of Britain. They lead us to the

work of Tocqueville whose 'history of the future' circled round the new democracy of the United States of America.

### III

Benjamin Constant was Sismondi's contemporary; Alexis de Tocqueville belonged to the following generation. While Constant freely acknowledged his indebtedness to Sismondi's thought, there is no mention of him in Tocqueville's work. This omission is, however, no indication of a lack of affinity. Tocqueville was not in the habit of giving credit to those who had influenced him in the formation of his opinions. Even Madame de Staël, without the knowledge of whose works on literature, Germany, and on the French Revolution, Tocqueville's *oeuvre* could hardly be imagined in its actual form; even the *Doctrinaires*, who included Royer-Collard and Guizot, were hardly ever quoted in his writings. On the other hand, we know from the testimony of his friends that Tocqueville was in the habit of making an exhaustive study of the relevant literature before he put pen to paper. Shortly after his death, a distinguished historian and literary critic, stated that:

Sismondi and Tocqueville inhabited the same spheres. The problems of government were in his hands not a mere matter of speculation but vital issues... One encounters [in Sismondi] quite a liberal system of the sort M. de Tocqueville has displayed with lucid penetration, and which has since held the attention of the best brains of our time, how to reconcile the rights of the individual with the common weal (Taillandier 1863, pp. 20-1).

If our two authors occupied the same spheres, what interests, ideas, activities and background in particular did they actually share? There is no intimation that they ever met. Given the transport conditions of the time, they lived in different worlds, Sismondi in Geneva and Tuscany, and Tocqueville in Paris and his French country seat. Both had intimate connections with British friends, though they were largely people of their own generation respectively. Both took a great interest in the United States and came to share a similar outlook as regards its significance. We

know for certain that Sismondi knew of Tocqueville, but we have only circumstantial evidence that, and to what extent, the latter was aware of the other.

There were a number of important mutual friends and acquaintances between them. The historian and diplomat, Comte Adolphe de Circourt and his Russian wife Anastasia, née de Klustine, were intimate friends, first of Sismondi and later also of Tocqueville. On April 12, 1842, Madame de Circourt reported to Sismondi about the reception of Tocqueville as a member of the *Académie française*, an honour which meant much to him at the time:

Yesterday I attended a literary celebration that attracted the élite of Paris; all the fashionable bodies were represented, both the poets and the women of the day were present. The *Académie* has forgotten its literary tradition, it has given us a piece of contemporary history... and has aroused the greatest public interest. M. de Tocqueville has been listened to in stony silence, his grand ideas concerning the threats to liberty, his bold strictures on the Empire and his fear of a new form of absolute power arising from so many conflicts, all this has not been understood by the audience though the subject was grave enough to evoke either complete agreement or decided rejection. Mr. Villemain and Mr. De Beaumont were his only benevolent listeners... their physiognomies betrayed incessant approval. Mr. Molé revived everyone, his clear and firm speech, animated by his expression and rendered with all the charm of an irreproachable diction, was received with extreme applause: when he defended the Empire, everyone was moved; when he praised the book of the new member, everyone understood, and the consensus between him and his audience was incontestable... never was courtesy more in need, none of Mr. De Tocqueville's ideas are approved by Mr. Molé, and yet he gave high and eloquent credit to convictions which he does not share and whose consequences he actually fears (unpublished letter Pescia Archive).

Apart from its anecdotal interest, this letter tells us a good deal - threats to liberty, bold strictures on the Empire (Napoleon's as well as the French Colonial Empire), fears of a new form of absolute

power - these points made by Tocqueville certainly were preoccupations of Sismondi. Moreover, both partisans of Tocqueville mentioned by name in Madame de Circourt's letter point to a possible connection between him and Sismondi. Abel-François Villemain (1790-1870), a leading French historian of literature (of the eighteenth century and the Middle Ages) and pre-eminent literary critic in between Madame de Staël and Sainte-Beuve, was the 'perpetual secretary' of the *Académie française* as well as minister of Public Education. He was one of Tocqueville's circle of friends; he persuaded the *Académie* to give Tocqueville a prize of 12,000 francs in recognition of the first part of *Democracy in America*; he published favourable reviews of this book as well as of the *Ancien Régime* and, though criticising many of Tocqueville's 'subtle analyses' in the second part of *Democracy*, he gave him an opportunity, in his reply, to re-think and sort out his 'ideal type' method.

The ceremony described by the Comtesse de Circourt took place on April 11, 1842. At the time, Villemain was in close touch by correspondence with Sismondi, his 'old friend', as he called him. On December 30 1841, he sent to Sismondi a complimentary copy of the precious *Collection of unpublished documents on French history*, published under the auspices of the Ministry of Public Education, in recognition of, and gratitude for, 'the great works that you have devoted to the history of our country with such steadfastness and success.' On January 7 1842, Villemain wrote again, offering Sismondi, on behalf of the King, his nomination as *Chevalier* of the *Légion d'honneur*, noting that the King had expressed his astonishment that this offer had not been made long ago. When Sismondi signalled his acceptance of the distinction, Villemain, by letter of January 16 1842, expressed his happiness to have been able to contribute to the conferment, so highly deserved, of this honour on a name celebrated in the world of letters (unpublished letters, Pescia Archive). Villemain treated literature in his lectures and works as an expression of society, an approach which he owed, apart from Madame de Staël, to Sismondi's work on *The Literature of the South of Europe* (1813), an approach which was also adopted by Tocqueville in *Democracy in America*. Madame de Circourt reported to Sismondi from Paris on January 27, that he was the object of 'so many

conversations', quoting the example of a party given by Lamartine, where Villemain talked all evening of the pleasure which a letter from Sismondi had given him. It is hardly conceivable that he should have been less communicative in his chats with Tocqueville and Beaumont.

Indeed, interest in Sismondi's work was particularly lively at the time, not only among uncompromising admirers such as Circourt, Buchon, Daunou, and Trognon, but also amongst the mainstream of romantic historians, such as Thierry, Guizot, Barante and Michelet. Volumes 24 and 26 of Sismondi's *History of the French* had just appeared with his bold strictures on the reign of Louis XIV, comparable to his earlier assessments of the calamitous rule of the emperor Augustus and of Lorenzo the Magnificent in Florence. Both Tocqueville and Beaumont, his alter ego, were members of the *Académie des sciences morales et politiques*, while Sismondi was one of its five foreign associates. The Academy's Secretary, François-Auguste Mignet, historian of Spain and Mary Stuart, asked Sismondi by letter of March 13, 1841 to contribute a treatise on the subject-matter of his recent volumes in the forthcoming publication of the Academy's *Transactions* (unpublished letter, Pescia Archive). Shortly afterwards, by letter of October 16 1841, Beaumont promised Tocqueville that he would compose an abstract of Sismondi's *History of the French* for *Le Siècle* newspaper which was then their mouthpiece. Eventually, however, after Sismondi's death on June 25, 1842, the article was not written, but the episode displays Tocqueville's and Beaumont's familiarity with some of Sismondi's work.

Tocqueville and Beaumont were lifelong partners ever since their early twenties. They studied, researched, travelled together, published on the same subjects, virtually corrected each other's writings, and co-operated in their publishing ventures, *Le Siècle* and *Le Commerce*. They read, *inter alia*, J-B. Say's *Cours d'économie politique*, Say's closest approximation to Sismondi's social economy. In the later eighteen twenties, they followed and read François Guizot's (1787-1874) lectures on representative government and on civilisation in Europe and France. Not least under these influences, Tocqueville's ideas crystallized into the substance he was later to give expression to in his great works on *Democracy in America* and the *Ancien Régime and the Revolution*. These

ideas included his preoccupation with liberty and equality and their mutual association, the conception of history as the receptacle of the tradition developed in the march of humankind, the diversity of the sources of progress, the class struggle, and the rise of the Third estate: treating these topics as revealing the spirit and character of individual historical epochs, in particular, the transition from the feudal or aristocratic epoch of Europe to the democratic, industrial era with its peculiar values and motivations.

#### IV

Guizot's ideas were indebted to the same intellectual tradition as Sismondi's, that is, the Scottish school of the eighteenth century merged into the republican tradition of Geneva. Guizot was a French Protestant who, after his father's execution by guillotine in 1794, had spent his formative years in the safety of Geneva. Although he was French by origin and reached the highest honours in French public life, Guizot was to suffer all his life from accusations of being a stranger to the mainstream of French political and cultural tradition, a creature, in fact, of the Genevan school. If even a native Frenchman could fall victim to such opprobrium, one cannot be surprised at the strong currents of opinion that objected to the recognition and influence of a foreigner and dissident such as Sismondi. Tocqueville's own quickly maturing ideas concerning the succession of historical epochs may be gauged from his letter of April 21, 1830, to Charles Stoffels where he talks of the spirit of consecutive ages of semi-barbarism and semi-enlightenment. Like Sismondi, he felt a gut preference for the later, modern era with its gifts of individual security and happiness. But, like Sismondi, he deplored the price to be paid for the suppression of the instinctive brutality, patriotism and devotion, of the earlier period that was to usher in a loss of altruistic sentiments such as love of country and religion. Therefore, it would be the task of government to issue directions with a view to safeguarding the moral qualities required for the preservation of a flourishing healthy society. Most of those notions, in some form or other, were common to Sismondi, Guizot and Tocqueville. As regards the crucial concept of the significance of consecutive historical periods, Guizot wrote to Sismondi on October 24, 1827:

No one, I am sure, reads you as much as I do, neither with more serious attention nor with more pleasure and profit; before you, the development, or rather the progressive formation, of the French nation and its civilisation had not even been suspected.

In his lectures on European civilisation Guizot recommended to his students the study of Sismondi, 'doubtless the best of all the histories of France.' However, Guizot's admiration for Sismondi cooled off after the latter's refusals in 1819, 1825 and 1830 of university chairs offered to him by Guizot, a power-hungry politician no less than a great historian. The final break between them occurred because of Sismondi's condemnation of the *Doctrinaires*, that is, the leaders of the July Revolution of 1830 and its subsequent governments, largely led by Guizot. Sismondi published two magisterial articles on this issue in the *Revue Encyclopédique*. The first, entitled 'The Future', welcomed the establishment of the first constitutional monarchy and, rather than predicting the future course of events, expressed his hopes concerning its activities.(Sismondi 1830). He attempted to investigate how, in the light of historical experience, the pitfalls of constitutional contradictions, in particular, of administrative centralisation, could be avoided in the pursuit of the newly achieved liberty of the people, of human dignity, the progress of morality, including justice and social guarantees for the less privileged. It was up to France, said Sismondi, to show the way to Europe.

Sismondi's second article on the July Revolution, 'The Expectations and the Realities' appeared within less than a year (Sismondi 1831). It was highlighted in an introduction by the editor, Hippolyte Carnot, as of 'great importance; a sage so loyal and so authoritative', was issuing the clarion call for the condemnation of the constitutional reforms of the new government. Fifteen years of opposition to the Bourbon restoration, Sismondi said, had been squandered for the sake of a phantom, namely rule in the interest of bankers whose investments and profits had been put above political and commercial probity and security, and who, by offering excessive credit facilities to entrepreneurs, invited over-production of goods and thus disorganised the national economy and labour relations. Lack of energy, courage and judgement, leading to dangerous and absurd actions, had proved to be the emblem of the new rulers. Sismondi's condemnation may be compared with

Tocqueville's later re-evaluation of the period as being ruled by 'an active, industrious spirit, often dishonourable, generally orderly, occasionally reckless through vanity or egoism... a government shorn of both virtue and greatness' (Tocqueville 1959, p. 3).

Moreover, Sismondi, in 1829, published a penetrating review paper on Guizot's *History of Civilisation* in the *Revue Encyclopédique* (n. 43 pp. 331-348) just when Tocqueville and Beaumont had embarked on reading Guizot's text. This article amounted to a masterful interpretation of the work as a sociological-historical panorama, depicting the march of civilisation, that is, man's material and spiritual development, the unfolding of liberty and order, as well as the tension between individual and society (Sismondi 1829). The development of civilisation in this sense had indeed been Sismondi's unifying idea in his historical works, though less abstract and richer in historical narrative than Guizot's philosophy. The message was well understood by the young John Stuart Mill, writing in the *Westminster Review* in July 1826 (pp. 63-4): anticipating Guizot's formulation, he described Jacques-Antoine's Delaure's *History of Paris* and Sismondi's *History of the French People* as 'a history of civilisation in France, which is, to a great degree, the history of civilisation in Europe... the genuine philosophy of history' (John Stuart Mill 1826).

The transition from aristocracy to democracy provided Tocqueville with a methodical basis for his search 'for an image of democracy itself, with its inclinations, its character, its prejudices and its passions.' In the year following Guizot's lectures, he and Beaumont embarked on the study of political economy. They read J.-B. Say on the voyage out to America (April 2 to May 9, 1831). We don't know whether it was the *Cours*, or the 1829 edition of the *Traité*: at any rate, it contained the late opinions of Say who had more than halfway met Sismondi's criticism. Three years later, in the course of his visit to England in 1833, Tocqueville entered on his lifelong friendship with Nassau Senior, the leading British economist between Ricardo and John Stuart Mill. But while he acknowledged his friend's lucid mind and technical superiority, Tocqueville rejected his strict separation of the theory of political economy from applied economic and social policy. What counted in Senior's economics was the production of material wealth, while Tocqueville understood



under wealth 'all that contributes to happiness, personal consideration, political right easy justice, intellectual enjoyment, and many other indirect sources of contentment. This is one of the most important questions of the age, and perhaps the one on which we differ most entirely' (Senior 1872, pp. 7-8). Sismondi could have written every word.

Sismondi was certainly no stranger to the educated circles of Paris in the early 1830s. His attack on the Orléans government in 1831 had been emphasised by the editor of the *Revue encyclopédique* as the representative voice of opposition. From 1833 to 1835, Sismondi's and his disciple Theodore Fix's articles appeared in the *Revue Mensuelle déconomie politique*, dealing with social and political questions which were right in the line of Tocqueville's and Beaumont's interests, such as the abolition of negro slavery, sociological interpretations of the working class in manufacturing industry, constitutional issues in free countries, including democracy in Switzerland and in America, representative government, executive power, universal suffrage and the political tyranny of the majority as well as the survival of aristocratic elements in the new egalitarian societies, and also on Algiers and on England.

It was a time when Tocqueville and Beaumont collected information on all such topics, both in their travels in England, Switzerland and Ireland, and by reading widely. It was the time when J.-A. Blanqui reported that the mention of Sismondi's name and views aroused the enthusiasm of his students. Moreover, Michelet published a masterful article in the *Revue de Paris* of March 1833, in which he celebrated Sismondi as the founding father of modern French historiography. The hijacking of the *Revue mensuelle* by Pellegrino Rossi and Blanqui on behalf of the establishment must have caused a stir in the intellectual world of the Capital. All these events could hardly have bypassed Tocqueville. There is no need, though, to rely on speculation in this case. Tocqueville's views on the impact of industrialism evolved under the guidance of Alban de Villeneuve-Bargemont's work *Économie Politique Chrétienne* (1834) and these views found some confirmation in Senior's disquisition on *The English Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834*. Tocqueville's own

observations of the English industrial scene did not add anything new to his views that were already formed before his journey in 1835.

As *Préfet* (head of provincial government) under Bourbon rule (1815-1830), the Vicomte de Villeneuve-Bargemont, had direct knowledge of unemployment and Luddite unrest. He admired and envied England for its alleged industrial prosperity which, like, Chaptal, he wished to see emulated in his own country. However, his belief in Adam Smith's and Say's teaching was shattered by his friendship with Bénédict Prévost, a professor of protestant theology at the university of Montauban, a Genevan cousin of Pierre Prévost, Sismondi's teacher and friend, whose translation into French of Malthus's *Essay on Population* he gave to Villeneuve; he thus become aware of the reverse side of capitalist economy but was unhappy with Malthus's theory of excess population as the cause of poverty. Villeneuve adopted Prévost's attribution of economic misery in England to their industrial system, which would issue in a fatal crisis in other countries that sought to imitate the English example. This was, of course, the message of Sismondi's *New Principles*.

Villeneuve's first volume dealt with the causes of pauperism, the second with the statistics on paupers in France, England, and Europe, with the charities engaged on their succour, and relevant legislation. The third volume contained reform proposals covering charitable institutions as well as a celebration of agriculture as the best means to assuage and prevent poverty. It was this last volume which served Tocqueville and Beaumont as a base for their parliamentary reform proposals. Villeneuve's work was a blend of economics, charity and religion. In the first of these subjects, he followed Pecchio, Sismondi and Malthus rather than Adam Smith and Say. His inspiration was the Old Testament, Deuteronomy Chapter 15, v. 7-11: 'Thou shalt open thine hand wide unto they brother, to thy poor, and to thy needy in the land.' He condemned materialist, and extolled moral, civilisation; the fault of the former, he felt, had been intellectually demolished by Malthus and Sismondi. He quoted Sismondi as an authority against Adam Smith; he accepted Sismondi's understanding of the class struggle as well as his belief that the English industrial system, unless

reformed, was doomed to bring on a violent catastrophe. His analysis of the economic situation (but not of the remedies required) was precisely that of Sismondi:

The English system rests on the concentration of capital, trade, land ownership, and industry; on unrestricted production; on universal competition; on the replacement of human labour by machines; on the reduction of salaries; on the perpetual stimulation of new physical wants; on the moral degradation of man. Let us, by contrast, found the French system upon a just distribution of industrial products, and equitable pay of labour... on agriculture, religious regeneration, and the great principle of charity (Villeneuve-Bargemont 1834, I, 23-4, 152; III, 98, 317).

Villeneuve recognised the novelty and importance of Sismondi's ideas. Although he quoted Sismondi himself time and again, he often preferred to quote Sismondi's disciple Joseph Droz, the author of *Économie politique, ou Principes de la science des richesses* (1829) who followed his master in most respects, but was closer to Villeneuve's heart as he asked for wider state intervention and treated political economy as an auxiliary of morality. Villeneuve's chapters XII and XIII of the first book on machines and the new industrial feudalism are altogether founded on Sismondi.

## V

The circumstantial evidence for the fact that Tocqueville must have been aware of Sismondi's *oeuvre* appears to be incontrovertible. But did it make an impact on Tocqueville's own views and work? Apart from scattered passages elsewhere, there are three of his publications relevant to this question, the *Memoir on pauperism* of 1835, *Democracy in America*, and the journalistic writings in the *Le Commerce* newspaper of 1844/1845.

The first of these, the *Memoir*, consists of a historical and a political-sociological part, both of which display Sismondian themes, namely the concept of the transition from the social stage of aristocracy to that of democracy, and the awareness of the dark side of production and the laws of

the market. In the first part, Villeneuve-Bargemont and Guizot were Tocqueville's acknowledge guides, and both in turn had conceded Sismondi's priority. The second part made use of the English Poor Law debate in the House of Commons that culminated in the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834. In common with the prevailing English view, Tocqueville conceived of social reform in terms of public acts and of individual charity. He condemned the former as too difficult to administer and as bound to deprave its beneficiaries by undermining their will to work and help themselves. By contrast, he regarded individual charity as morally and practically acceptable in that it created relations of community and loyalty between giver and receiver; however, under the sway of industrialism, it had proved to be incapable of making a sufficient contribution to the social question. What was needed in Tocqueville's mind, was 'a more constant and exact relationship between the production and consumption of manufactured goods'. The idea of the proportionality of production and consumption was no doubt suggested to Tocqueville by Villeneuve, following Sismondi. But when it came to more specific proposals of remedies, all that Tocqueville produced was the idea of helping the working classes to accumulate savings (by establishing savings banks) which would allow them to survive a reversal of fortune in times of industrial calamity. This scheme compared unfavourably with Sismondi's list of remedies given in book VII ('of population'), chapters VII, VIII and IX of the *New Principles*, second edition, calling for a 'social guarantee' or, in modern terms, the welfare state in which the employer would grant profit-sharing to his employees and take on responsibility for times of unemployment, illness and accident. Thus, a community of interest and goals would be created which would result in a sense of achievement and public pride, akin to the public virtue of aristocratic times, that is, in positive liberty. Apparently, Tocqueville had not studied the *New Principles*. He found himself at sea, and it is, therefore, not surprising that he never proceeded to writing the second article which, he had promised, would deal with the remedies needed to put an end to pauperism.

The year 1835 saw the publication both of the *Memoir* and the first part of *Democracy in America*. Its subject matter, the impact of a democratic state on the laws and the political character of the

nation, did not call for an exposition of reform proposals concerning the industrial scene. However, what little evidence there is reveals Tocqueville as struggling with this problem. In his last chapter, he surveyed the reasons which made the United States a great commercial nation. One of the reasons he singled out was the lack of a division of labour, that practice which Adam Smith had extolled as the very generator of productivity, admitting, at the same time, that the exclusive occupation with detail alienated the workers' minds from any higher understanding of whole and complex procedures. John Millar had emphasised these deleterious effects of the division of labour, and it was Sismondi who had made this process of alienation one of the cornerstones of his critique. Taking his cue from Villeneuve and the late Say of 1829, Tocqueville extolled the flexibility of the American worker and condemned the division of labour no less than Sismondi. 'The art to divide labour is the art to confiscate the intelligence of the greatest number for the profit of the few.' In a note to this passage, he referred to the example of England for the incidence of alienation. The American, by contrast, he saw as an all-rounder who, though he did certain details less competently than a European, was a hundred times more intelligent and superior in the arts of life and government. Tocqueville did not publish this note: he may have thought it wiser not to stick his neck out unnecessarily.

The publication of the second part of *Democracy in America* in 1840, gave him the opportunity to return to the issue in somewhat greater depth, in chapters XIX and XX of the third book, where he examined the questions why Americans turned spontaneously to industrial professions, and why a new aristocracy might be arising from this tendency; these questions were part of his scrutiny of the relationship of democracy and civil (in contrast to political) society. In chapter XIX, he adopted Sismondi's contention that economic crises, rather than being of a merely contingent nature (as J-B. Say had contended in 1814), were due to the chaotic character of the market, as it was inherent in the existing capitalist system, 'an endemic malady of modern democratic nations.' In chapter XX, he set out from the two fundamental truths alleged by classical economy, namely that the division of labour gives rise to greater productivity, and that a large enterprise, made possible by the

accumulation of capital, results in higher production and profitability. However, Tocqueville contended, 'the first degrades and brutalizes the labourer, and the second constantly gives more power to the master: they introduce aristocratic principles into the industrial society.' He proceeded to a more detailed depiction of this process which, he said, led to an increasing division of society into two opposed classes as well as to the rise of a new absolute aristocracy in a society which, in the political and cultural fields, was actually heading towards equality. There was then a potentially disastrous situation which cried out for intervention by the legislator. 'I don't see anything in the political world which must pre-occupy the legislator more urgently than these two axioms of industrial science.' The subject matter of this chapter had been treated by Villeneuve in a chapter on 'the new feudalism', and it had been scrutinised in even greater detail by Sismondi ever since he had started writing: it was, he stated in Theodore Fix's *Revue mensuelle d'économie politique* of July and August 1834, 'what appears to us the most important of all questions in political economy' (Sismondi 1835). If Tocqueville had been asked to give a *précis* of Sismondi's views on the matter, he could not have done better. All the same, he may not have read those and any other articles published by Sismondi at the time.

It is true that Tocqueville's stand on industrialism can be, and has been, criticised as being one-sidedly psychological, middle class bourgeois and individualistic, as well as self-contradictory in its successive leanings towards liberty and authority. These criticisms throw light equally on Sismondi's and Tocqueville's views. However, they reveal their liberal and conservative statements as a finely tuned amalgam of difference facets of the same phenomenon, rather than as mutually incompatible proportions. The celebration of liberty, without sacrificing order and harmony, was indeed the aim of both those thinkers. Like Tocqueville, Sismondi has been depicted as representative for the middle class bourgeoisie by Marx and Engels in the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848. On the other hand, both Sismondi and Tocqueville criticised and rejected what they regarded as the middle class world view that had become dominant since the July revolution of 1830 with its deification of production and profit. Neither of them commended unrestricted liberty and a market

economy regulated only by competition or, as Sismondi expressed it, 'the schemes of each individual against society and sacrificing the cause of humanity to the simultaneous whims of all the individual cupidities.' (Sismondi 1819, II, 246) Their aim, in Tocqueville's words, was 'the idea of a balanced, regulated liberty, held in check by religion, custom and law' (Tocqueville 1959, p. 68).

Apart from raising social reform proposals in parliament, Tocqueville, assisted by Beaumont and other friends, gave ample expression to his views on the new industrial society in the *Le Commerce* daily newspaper, control of which was in his hands from mid 1844 to mid 1845. The subjects treated in Tocqueville's articles covered the questions of alienation, the loss of political and social participation of the bulk of the population, the class struggle, the tyranny of the majority and the despotism of minorities, especially the new industrial feudality, the dark aspects of the division of labour and of competition, international competition leading to internecine war administrative despotism and decentralisation as well as working class associations and guilds (suggested as remedies for the decline of political cohesion), social harmony and the deteriorating quality of life. All these themes were close to Sismondi's heart and had been stated and restated by him from the outset of his publishing life in the 1790s, culminating in the *New Principles* and the *Inquiries*. Both men basically shared the same interest, gut reactions, methods, principles and ideals. Both were constructive liberals, combining Humean scepticism with reforming optimism. But was Sismondi's much quoted adage 'I am a liberal, I am a republican, I shall never be a democrat' not incompatible with Tocqueville's vindication of democracy as well as with his respect for aristocratic virtues? As regards republicanism, they agreed in fact that liberty, their guiding principle, could flourish or perish in the guise of various forms of government.

'I think', said Sismondi, in his work on 'Executive Power' published in the *Annales de Législation* in 1823, 'that liberty equally possible in a constitutional monarch as in a republic... I believe that in every nation, a system has almost always been founded on antecedent ones; that facts govern it, that powers existed before a nation was called upon to give laws to herself, and that the great skill of the

legislator consists in respecting those facts, in profiting by these powers and in placing the future in harmony with the past. But I am a republican as regards Switzerland and Geneva, my country; I am one as regards America and all new countries...' (Sismondi 1823). Tocqueville's personal preference for France was for a constitutional monarchy rather than the republic which always promised more but gave less liberty than the constitutional monarchy; yet, even for France, he did not look upon the republic as absolutely impossible (Tocqueville 1959, p. 223).

Unlike republicanism, democracy is a word with many meanings. What Sismondi rejected was the plurality of votes leading to the tyranny of the majority, that is, pure democracy, as it had, in some of the Swiss cantons, been kept alive. He abhorred the use of torture and the custom of military service to foreign despots, thus enabling them to keep other nations in chains. While spurning Rousseau's conception of the general will, Sismondi embraced Madame de Staël's understanding of public opinion as the consensus of the best, the most enlightened and progressive voices of the nation. Like Delolme, he championed the concept of representative government rather than democracy to give voice and institutional support to the different interests, feelings and opinions of the nation. Representative government was not an end in itself; it was in Sismondi's eyes an expedient rather than a principle, embodying not so much a right of every individual to be represented as a right to be well governed, that is, to see himself respected and his interests and opinions taken into consideration, even when in a minority. The means to bring this about were, according to Sismondi, Harringtonian mixed government and corporate assemblies, but he refrained from the 'presumption to offer a solution' to the complex problem of general participation of all in political power as he did 'not think that there is anyone which can adapt itself to all nations' (Sismondi 1848, p. 307).

Both Tocqueville and Sismondi believed that their era was faced with a new structure of society, the full understanding of which required a new social science of politics and of political economy, taking the place of an obsolete science of government which was unnecessarily tied to time and place and therefore relevant only to a particular nation; they further believed that the social



revolution was far from being accomplished, and that the popular quest for greater equality, though irresistible, needed to be educated by strengthening its faith, purifying its morals, and guiding its energies, its inexperience and its ignorance of its true interests. Tocqueville was neither a champion nor an adversary of democracy; he regarded himself as the observer of a social scene which might lead to greater equality or, indeed, inequality, to the disintegration of society unless its actual and potential nature was understood in all its facets and, unless it was safeguarded against its inherent hazards. But, like Sismondi, Tocqueville held that 'it is not the prosperity of the few, but the greater well being of all, which is most pleasing in the sight of the Creator and Preserver of men.' Both men were imbued with the ideas of traditional moral standards as well as of the ideas of social reform by way of the emancipation of the proletariat. Sismondi had been the first to give these ideas systematic expression in his economic writings which anteceded and influenced writers from Villeneuve-Bargemont and other Catholics such as Lamennais, and Buchez no less than the Saint-Simonians. If the *Doctrinaires* were unreservedly linked with the Bourgeoisie, Tocqueville and Sismondi were free to take their stand against bourgeois values.

There is no need to stress the fact that both were among the great champions of liberty, by means of their writings as well as in their political activity. There is, at times, an uncanny affinity between their pronouncements on this all-important issue. Both Sismondi and Tocqueville were united in wishing to preserve a maximum of liberty within a secure community. Any differences in their political and social views were, to a large extent, a matter of degree rather than of principle. Tocqueville was more optimistic as regards the questions of democracy and socialism, but both feared democratic despotism. They saw eye to eye in such fundamental issues as religion and the concept of history. Despite their Catholicism and Calvinism respectively, they were really Unitarians in their religious beliefs (Senior 1862, I, 187). In their understanding of history, both Sismondi and Tocqueville may be described as Kantians. History was, for them, a means to an end. They traced the true facts of the past with a view to redirecting the existing trends into new and more desirable channels. History thus became the history of the future as well as the past, the

pursuit of truth (the facts) and happiness (the values). In his first work, the *Researches*, the young Sismondi had defined happiness as the attainment of liberty, virtue (its own reward), order, and legal and economically viable justice. The examination of England and America respectively was forcing both writers to analyse not only what had really happened, but what was to be judged wrong in the inherited tradition, and how it should be reformed with due allowance made for the unalterable facts of the human condition as well as of cultural and geographical circumstances. Both turned sharply against *Historismus*. In their eyes, mankind was endowed with the capacity of free will so as to choose its own style of life, 'not entirely independent or altogether servile', as Tocqueville expressed it; he rejected the subjugation to racial, climatic and historical conventions. So did Sismondi, who never tired of exploring historical truth so that traditions could be judged and, if need be, discarded.

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